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ABSTRACT

In the Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland), as well as in the rest of the world, it is a constant challenge to match education and training to the rapid pace of change. In order to meet the demands of the future, major changes in both the structure and content of vocational education and training have taken place during the 1990s in all Nordic countries. For example, Norway has radically changed its model of technical and vocational education. Since 1994, vocational and technical education has been based on the 2+2 model--2 years in school followed by 2 years in a training enterprise. In Finland, upper secondary vocational education and training programs have been lengthened, with the time for on-the-job training increased. The philosophy in the Nordic countries is that vocational education and training involves competence building beyond the acquisition of work-related skills. Students who complete their education should have the skills they need to function in the society and to participate in democratic processes. There are, however, also differences between Nordic countries. Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish vocational education and training have traditionally been strictly institution based, although recent reforms have increased work-based training, especially in Norway and Finland. Denmark, however, retains the traditional apprenticeship system, but in a modernized form. In the future, the system in the Nordic countries should be reformed to enhance the status of vocational education, to make it more flexible, and to increase the focus on lifelong education. (KC)

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CHALLENGES TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

One of the central objectives today should be ensuring vocational education and training for the entire population, regardless of age. It is particularly important in view of the future that the vocational education and training of youth is guaranteed internationally. We cannot afford to exclude anyone from vocational training; this statement is made fully aware of the fact that, in the global perspective, illiteracy often prevents access to vocational training. Although the ways of implementing vocational education and training are largely culture-dependent, we can also learn from each others' methods and manners.

I have pleasure to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland). We truly appreciate the decision made by UNESCO and the Republic of Korea to organise this international congress.

Today, the most characteristic features are internationalisation and an unparalleled rat of change in all areas of society and the world of work. The speed of change is no slowing down; on the contrary, everyone in the labour market will be facing an increasing need for continuous development of personal competence.
A wide-ranging basic knowledge is one of the most important instruments of life control in the changing world. Insufficient education is threatening to become a major handicap.

Research, human knowledge and competence are regarded as the central factors o production. This view results from the prevailing economic ideology and the knowledge-intensive economic activity. The role of education in developing the quality of these factors is widely recognised.

Education and the planning of education have recently risen to the challenge o accelerating reform processes: the speed and extent of technological change, the strengthening of economic competition, internationalisation, the ageing of the population as well as the diversification of clientele of education and training.

Among the many fields of education, vocational education and training are inevitably closest to the heart of these changes. The relationship between education and training and working life is the subject of continuous discussion. The most transparent and

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challenging questions are the same in most countries, despite the differences in educational systems: How to keep up vocational education and training wit continuous changes and meet the requirements of the society and the world of work? How to make vocational education and training attractive to youth? Which is the best way to ensure youth a smooth transition from training to working life? How to create a system providing everyone the opportunity for individual continuing education and lifelong learning? How extensively should the mastery of professional skills, general education, and so called generic skills be combined, or, on the other hand, kept separate? How to divide costs and labour between the educational system and the world of work most efficiently?

The strategy of welfare in all of the Nordic countries is based on knowledge and competence and efficient utilisation of them. A well functioning educational system is the most important factor in augmenting the intellectual capital of a nation. It enables us to increase economic growth, to establish conditions essential for employment, and to create the possibilities for personal growth and a life with dignity.

In order to meet the demands of the future, major changes have taken place in vocational education and training during the 1990´s in every Nordic country Development concerns both the structure and the content of education. Changes have been introduced in close co-operation with the social partners. Reforms have been designed to ensure that all young people have a possibility to achieve a recognised qualification.

Norway has radically changed the model of technical and vocational education - since 1994 it is based on the 2+2 model, two years in school followed by two years in a training enterprise. Co-operation with the social partners has been instrumental in increasing the number of apprenticeship places by 60 to 70 per cent in the last four years, but the supply is not yet sufficient, and efforts are being made to increase the number of places available.

Another major ongoing reform in Finland is the lengthening of the upper secondary vocational education and training programmes and increasing the share of on-the-j learning in them. New programmes provide broadly-based qualifications and more job-specific qualifications. To enhance links between vocational education and working life, compulsory on-the-job learning periods are included in qualifications. These periods will require a vast increase in the amount of teaching provided in real working environments and also a rearrangement of the relationship between education and the world of work.

All Nordic countries regard it as important that vocational education and training involves competence building beyond the acquisition of work-related skills. Vocationa syllabuses and programmes give also weight to general subjects. In addition, new so called generic skills are becoming more and more important (e.g. entrepreneurship, problem solving, team work). E.g. in Norway, the first two years of vocational education take place in upper secondary schools where young people from different areas of study meet and mix freely. In Finland, new three-year vocational programmes give eligibility for further studies at the tertiary level: the graduates can apply for admission to polytechnics or universities. Every student is expected to acquire the

skills he or she needs to function in the society, to participate in democratic processes, and to take responsibility for decisions that affect the class, the school, and the society.

There are, however, also differences between the Nordic countries. Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish vocational education and training has traditionally been strictly institution-based - although reforms during 1990´s increase work-placed training especially in Norway and Finland. At the same time, Denmark sticks proudly to the traditional apprenticeship system - in a modernised form. The system is for the moment under reform, with the following main principles:

- the VET-system must become more attractive and attain a higher status in order to enhance the competitiveness and the quality of the syste
- the system should be simplified, so that students do not necessarily have to make a binding choice between 90 different trades/programmes from the very start.
- the system shall have a more trustworthy form in the sense that the true capacity o both access to vocational college and the supply of practical training places should match with students needs much better than at presen
- flexibility in the system should be significantly enhanced
- a modernised system should encompass more options for academic supplements to vocationally oriented programmes, thus offering students the opportunity to be examined, either in part or in full, for higher education entry requirements
- more focus on continuing and lifelong education perspectives
- better opportunities for weak performers should contribute to the realisation of the overall goal of education-for-all.

The need for continuing renewal of competence of the population, affecting society as a whole, the workplace and the individual, has been recognised as an important challenge in Nordic countries. The Norwegian Parliament has recently approved the establishment of a system for documenting non-formal learning. This is particularly appropriate for adults who have gained their skills and competence in unconventional ways, and it will enable them to build on their competence at the appropriate level. In Finland, it has been possible since 1994 to acquire vocational qualification through competence-based qualifications system which emphasises working life and is based on the demonstration of skills. A key goal for the competence-based vocational qualifications is to develop examination procedures leading to qualifications regardless of the form in which the skills have been acquired.

Proficiency requirements both place new demands on the continuing education of individuals already employed and require a higher standard of education from those entering the labour market. This is why the demand for vocational education on a post-secondary level is on the increase. Sweden, for instance, has responded to these demands by launching a pilot project involving qualified vocational education, which combines practical skills with advanced theoretical knowledge. Qualified vocationa education is scheduled to be permanently incorporated into the Swedish educational system in 2002. Finland has during the 1990s upgraded a part of former vocational institutions into polytechnics which provide the highest level of vocational education. Polytechnics form a non-university sector which operates alongside the universit sector and prepare students for tertiary diplomas. The principles underlying polytechnic

education derive from the need for a highly-trained expert workforce in the labour market.

Principal aims in the immediate future in the Nordic countries can be summed up in five central concepts:

- Enabling young people in vocational education and training to understand the values of the society they live in and the importance of their own commitment to standards.
- Building bridges from vocational education and training to the world of work.
- Providing education and training of the highest possible quality, to meet the demands of a competitive society, both nationally and internationally
- Building sufficient flexibility into the education system, so that the needs of the individual, the world of work and the society can be met within the existing structures.
- Ensuring that new knowledge and breadth of competence are available to a sections of society and in all phases of life.